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SUBJECT: SACP LONG ON IDEALS, SHORT ON IDEAS

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PRETORIA 00002602 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Elizabeth Hinson. Reason
s 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Attending the South African Communist Party's 12th Congress (SACP) in Port Elizabeth 11-15 July was like traveling back in time. Communist dogma was used to justify the severe measures the party has recently taken to maintain discipline. SACP policy proposals such as nationalizing key industries were recommended as if they made sense and capitalism would soon fail to exist. Female delegates were hard to find. Rumors of leader Blade Nzimande's lavish lifestyle were on everyone's lips. And yet, in spite of the lack of substance, freedom, or equality within the party, delegates appeared energized and optimistic that their lives were somehow about to drastically change for the better. Delegates' blind faith in an outdated political paradigm like communism, coupled with the party's ability to double its membership in the last 2 1/2 years, clearly says something about life in post-apartheid South Africa. Mainly, that the SACP's rank-and-file members are disproportionately young, disadvantaged, and easily influenced by propaganda. They also seem to be looking for someone to lead them, in this case ANC Deputy President Jacob Zuma, to a better life. END SUMMARY.

OVERALL ATMOSPHERICS

12. (C) PolOff attended the 12th Congress of the South African Communist Party in Port Elizabeth 11-15 July. The Congress drew some big names such as ANC Deputy President Jacob Zuma, ANC Secretary General Kgalema Motlanthe, Transport Minister Jeff Radebe, Education Minister Naledi Pandor, Safety and Security Minister Charles Ngakula, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, and prominent businessmen Patrice Motsepe and presidential hopeful Tokyo Sexwale. President Mbeki did not attend as originally planned -- he was on personal leave and said that he could not alter his schedule. Some delegates told PolOff they believe he did not come because he was scared of the reception he would have received after his critical comments of the SACP at the ANC policy conference in June, while government officials like NEC member Ebrahim Ebrahim and Minister Radebe told PolOff that Mbeki was "on vacation." However, Minister Pandor told PolOff that Mbeki had been sick and was forced to take vacation. Either way, Mbeki's absence was taken as another slight against the SACP.

13. (C) Contrary to media accounts, the crowd of almost 2,000 delegates was animated and sang a lot, but were never out of control. Leader Blade Nzimande opened the conference by cataloguing his view of the party's successes, touting the recent public sector strike as an example of working class hegemony. He bragged about the party's influence and revised history a bit by adding that the ANC Policy Conference "confirmed the ANC has shifted to the left." (NOTE: Mbeki's opening speech at the ANC Policy Conference probably set the record straight when he told the SACP that while the alliance will live forever, the ANC and SACP should not prescribe policy to each other or choose each other's leadership. END NOTE) Nzimande also (inaccurately) criticized the United States several times during the day for its "new security strategy that says it can invade any country that tries to prevent free trade or match it militarily."

14. (C) After Nzimande's keynote address, delegates were invited to suggest any items they would like discussed in plenary. Instead of substantive issues, delegates focused for hours on peripheral issues such as the definition of "adjourn," check-out time at the university dorms, forgotten punctuation in leaflets, and clarification on rules about heckling, speaking limits, and how commissions would be run. According to Michael Sachs, one of Finance Minister Manuel's advisors who attended the event on behalf of the ANC, all of the questions about who would take notes or chair the commissions were not normal and showed that the party "was undergoing some trust issues." Sachs added that it also showed the SACP leadership had not shared any of the documents or agenda with the rank and file before the congress started. (BIO NOTE: Sachs is the natural son of former SACP leader Joe Slovo, but raised by his natural mother and her husband, Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs. When asked if he was a communist member, Sachs laughed and said he left the party along with Mbeki and Zuma

PRETORIA 00002602 002.2 OF 004

in 1989 "after seeing the writing on the wall." END NOTE)

PRO-ZUMA LEADERSHIP USHERED IN

15. (C) Pro-Zuma supporters within the party, especially the Young Communist League (YCL), are likely pleased with the party's new leadership. Blade Nzimande and ANC MP Jeremy Cronin were voted in as General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary again. Former labor union leader Gwede Mantashe

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ousted Safety and Security Minister Nqakula, Ncumisa Nkondlo will be Mantashe's deputy, and Pumulo Masaulie will replace recently ousted Philip Dexter as Treasurer. SACP and current cabinet members viewed as pro-Mbeki, including Nqakula Radebe, Minister of Local Government Mufamade, and Minister of Intelligence Kasrils were either not renominated or chose not to stand for renomination. Not surprisingly, Nzimande made a not-so-subtle jab at current communists serving in Mbeki's government by telling the crowd before nominations were put forward, "that communists should be loyal to the party first, and if they can't, they should quit."

16. (C) The new leadership, combined with the SACP's heavy-handed tactics over the past year, should ensure this "party discipline," which was a conference undercurrent centering around any comments critical of the SACP's unwavering loyalty to Zuma. At one point, Nzimande told the delegates that, "No one should be afraid to raise any important issue if it is constructive and remains inside party, but if the party decides something, people must act on it, otherwise it will be considered ill-disciplined." Those guilty of ill-discipline have paid a price over the past year. Most recently, SACP Treasurer Philip Dexter was suspended for after suggesting that the SACP leadership was becoming Stalinist and intolerant. Former spokesperson

Mazibuko Jara was also suspended for ill-discipline last year after writing a critique of the SACP entitled, "What color is our flag: Red or JZ?" (NOTE: JZ stands for Jacob Zuma and is pronounced "jay-zed." END NOTE) Former national deputy organizer Nkosiphendule Kholisile and former Gauteng Provincial Secretary Vishwas Satgar have also been purged from the party for questioning what they view as opportunistic support for Zuma.

OVERARCHING RESOLUTIONS LACK DETAIL

17. (C) Over 100 resolutions were proposed during the conference, all of which were drafted before the conference and only one of which was controversial -- the decision of whether to break away from the ANC tripartite coalition to contest the 2009 election as an independent party. The resolutions are far-reaching, touching on issues ranging from the casualization of labor to the Kyoto Protocol to the international drug trade and religious fundamentalism. The resolutions clearly lay out constraints to reaching their goals, but not one strategy to overcoming any of the barriers. (NOTE: Resolutions can be found at www.sacp.org.za. END NOTE) Highlights include:

-- The SACP and State Power: The SACP should provide strategic leadership for key policies of state power, including industrial policy, social and safety policies, and security and defense sectors. As for contesting elections outside the alliance, the SACP decided it will hold a separate conference on the issue after the ANC elects its new president. (NOTE: Nzimande, who clearly has a vested interest in the outcome in the next ANC presidential election, told the crowd "not to come here arguing for contesting elections just because you've just lost an ANC council seat and I don't want to hear people say they don't want to contest elections just because they've just won an ANC council seat!" END NOTE)

-- Building Working Class Power: The SACP should ensure that a national democratic, state-led industrial policy promotes a labor-intensive manufacturing sector as the basis to transform, diversify, and build a vibrant economy. The SACP calls for the re-nationalization of companies in strategic sectors such as energy giant SASOL and Mittal Steel and for trade and macroeconomic policy to be subordinated to the logic of a future national industrialization strategy that meets basic human needs and addresses the problem of labor casualization.

PRETORIA 00002602 003.2 OF 004

-- Transforming the Financial Sector: The SACP will work toward transforming and regulating the financial sector for developmental purposes. (NOTE: Nzimande told the crowd, "It's outrageous that if you apply for a loan at one of the four banks in this country and you tell them you want to invest it in a white-owned sector, they won't give it to you!" He also openly criticized the ANC Women's League by saying it should not be turned into another movement "just to get government tenders." END NOTE)

-- Social Development: The SACP will campaign for free, quality education and health care for all and reaffirm its call for the Basic Income Grant as an important economic intervention.

-- Build a Democratic, Activist Developmental State: The SACP calls for a South African developmental state that seek to "roll back the domination of the mineral-energy-finance monopoly capitalist complex."

-- Fighting Patriarchy and "Lumpen Patriarchy:" The SACP will strongly engage patriarchal ideas, attitudes and practices and educate men and women on the negative impact of

patriarchy. (NOTE: A group of female delegates from Kwa-Zulu Natal told PolOff outside the conference venue that it is still very difficult for women to be active in the SACP. When PolOff asked why, they simply said they were "too scared to speak up." SACP delegates will vote on whether women should comprise 1/3 of congress delegates at the next congress in 2 and 1/2 years, meaning it would not be effective until 2012. END NOTE)

-- The SACP and International Struggles: The SACP will contribute to the transformation of the UN, embark on work brigades in identified Latin American countries (e.g. Cuba, Bolivia, and Venezuela), approach the drug industry as a security issue, and understand the role of religious fundamentalism in South Africa, Africa and global politics.

-- Africa and SADC: The SACP will work to ensure that South Africa's Multi-National Corporations are accountable and contribute to development, will monitor privatization on the continent, and will look at the degeneration of post-independence liberation movements on the continent.

MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS TELL SOME OF STORY

18. (C) According to the SACP, they have increased their membership substantially from 19,385 in 2002 to 51,784 today.

According to Radebe, the dramatic increase is due to COSATU's campaign to "flood the SACP," the fact that "communism speaks to the problems of working-class people," and an international response to globalization in general. While the numbers look impressive, most of the members are also likely members of the ANC and/or COSATU, making it almost impossible to gauge the actual strength of individual parties or the intensity of individual support within the tripartite alliance. If the ANC currently has 600,000 paid members, as Radebe told PolOff, the SACP would comprise only 8 percent of the ANC, assuming almost all are dual-hatted. If the number is closer to the generally accepted number of 400,000, their numbers may represent around 12.5 percent. However, Presidential policy advisor (and former COSATU chief economist) Neva Makgetla (protect) on 19 July told PolOff that COSATU estimates that 80 percent of SACP members would vote for the ANC over the SACP if they had to choose.

HONORING CUBA

19. (C) The Chris Hani Award was given to Fidel Castro in honor of his support of the SACP over the past four decades. The first secretary of Cuba's communist party, (NFI) Ramirez, accepted the award on Castro's behalf and then spent the next half-hour contrasting all of the great things Cuba has done for the world compared to U.S. imperialism. Ramirez said that Cuba has "deployed over 42,000 Cuban professionals to over 100 countries, given over 30,000 international scholarships, and helped cure blindness in over 700,000 people." He then spoke about the Bush administration's "constant lying to push a neo-conservative agenda, the massacre of over 100,000 Iraqis, the legalization of torture and illegal detention in the United States, and the increase in drug production in Afghanistan." According to Ramirez

PRETORIA 00002602 004.2 OF 004

"the U.S. has tried to defeat Cuba at a cost of \$90 billion dollars over the past 10 US administrations" and has attempted to kill Castro over 600 times.

110. (C) Ramirez literally received the reception of a rock star. After his speech, the crowd went wild with cheers and he received a standing ovation. Many delegates also rushed the stage to get a photo of him with their cell phones. Senior ANC Researcher Wande Makalima (who did not attend the conference) told PolOff that Cuba is and always will be South

Africa's friend. When asked how South Africans can overlook how the state apparatus operates in Cuba, Makalima seemed to dismiss even the suggestion. He added that South African government officials travel "all the time" to Cuba and have never heard any hints of unhappiness. PolOff suggested that maybe it's because government officials meet with other government officials, but Makalima dismissed the notion again, saying he personally knows the South African Ambassador to Cuba and that "she loves it."

CULT OF PERSONALITY

¶11. (C) During the conference, press reports about Nzimande's lavish lifestyle surfaced. The Mail and Guardian reported that he earns the salary equivalent to a deputy minister (between \$100,000-\$115,000 USD), that he lives in an upmarket suburb of Johannesburg, and has a personal chauffeur. Nzimande flew to the conference and was chauffeured to the venue's front doors in a white Mercedes each morning. The overwhelming majority of delegates were working-class or unemployed who came to the conference on overnight trains or crowded minibuses and walked the 1 kilometer to the venue from their dorms at Nelson Mandela University. Both Reuters journalist Joseph Oemo (protect) and French diplomat Irchad Razaaly (protect) told PolOff that it is also well-known that Nzimande drinks to excess. Razaaly also joked about how much Nzimande will talk after he has had a few drinks.

¶12. (C) Press reports also noted that there is concern within the party that Nzimande is developing a cult-like following as a result of his and his inner circle's blind support for Zuma and the anticipation of what a Zuma presidency would look like (i.e. government positions for Zuma supporters). SACP deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin publicly denied that there was a cult-like following, but did admit that the party "needs to watch that (because) it's been a legacy in some communist parties that has become very dangerous."
(COMMENT: Nzimande is a very charismatic figure who knows how to entertain an audience. For example, the crowd roared with laughter for several minutes when Blade said, "I'd rather be accused of riding on the coattails of workers (than) hang myself on an apron string of the white bourgeoisie." END COMMENT)

COMMENT

¶13. (C) While the membership swell should not be overemphasized in the context of the tripartite alliance, it should not be completely discounted either with regards to governance. The increase can be seen as a sign that thousands of individuals within the coalition are growing disillusioned with the party -- perhaps not over Marxist ideology, but over bread-and-butter issues such as employment, working conditions, health care, and education. Clearly, ANC supporters in several provinces are increasingly frustrated by the slow pace of the ANC's ability to realize quality of life and work issues for all. This frustration has already led to violent protests against the lack of service delivery and reactionary police responses that have greatly concerned Mbeki's government. Under Nzimande's leadership, the SACP appears to be presenting itself as a panacea to South Africa's have-nots. And while the have-nots need a voice in a paternalistic, top-down system that has few avenues for grassroots inputs, neither communist ideology nor experience has ever shown an ability to deliver the goods. In the end, however, and perhaps most importantly, even the most disaffected voters will find it hard not to vote for the ANC.
Bost